

## medium luci by handydandynotebook

**Category:** Stranger Things (TV 2016)

**Genre:** Abusive Relationships, Angst, Bisexual Billy Hargrove, Child Abuse, Closeted Character, Compulsory Heterosexuality, Gen, Homophobia, Internal Conflict, Moral Dilemmas, Not Happy, Period Typical Attitudes, background genderbending

**Language:** English

**Characters:** Billy Hargrove, Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Neil Hargrove, Susan Hargrove

**Relationships:** Susan Hargrove & Maxine "Max" Mayfield

**Status:** Completed

**Published:** 2021-06-10

**Updated:** 2021-06-10

**Packaged:** 2022-03-31 14:38:34

**Rating:** Teen And Up Audiences

**Warnings:** No Archive Warnings Apply

**Chapters:** 1

**Words:** 2,512

**Publisher:** archiveofourown.org

**Summary:**

“I’ll be right there,” Neil concludes as he hangs up, turning those hard eyes onto Susan. “That was the school.”

“Oh dear...what’s Billy done this time?”

“Not Billy.” Neil shakes his head and Susan’s heart drops with the realization her husband isn’t just irritated but seething, knuckles blanched as his hands ball into tight fists. “Maxine.”

## medium luci

### Author's Note:

idea i sent @lucdarling for a tumblr meme but then like. also decided to do a version of, ig.

It's rare that Susan and Neil have the same weekday off. Neil typically works five days a week and she three or four, depending who's on staff, being that she's only part-time. But he'd had a dentist appointment midmorning so he'd taken today off and decided to make his hours up by volunteering for a double next week.

Susan doesn't typically care to spend any extra time alone with her husband. They have so little to talk about these days, now that he doesn't try to butter her up or feed her honey sweet lies as much as he used to. Now that Neil doesn't care to talk much at all unless ranting or complaining about the various things he doesn't like, his son's style of dress, women who sit with their legs open, cab drivers who don't speak English. Susan doesn't even remember the last time Neil had to take a cab but he has strong opinions on them nonetheless, and the list goes on and on.

He thankfully hasn't done much of that today, however. He'd parked himself in front of the television after coming home from his appointment and simply nodded when Susan announced she was going out to garden. She only comes inside when she hears the phone ring and by the time she's walking up the back steps, Neil's already answered it.

She watches his expression change as he converses with whomever's on the other end, nervousness fluttering in her chest as his eyes widen, then harden.

"I'll be right there," Neil concludes as he hangs up, turning those hard eyes onto Susan. "That was the school."

"Oh dear...what's Billy done this time?"

"Not Billy." Neil shakes his head and Susan's heart drops with the

realization her husband isn't just irritated but seething, knuckles blanched as his hands ball into tight fists. "Maxine. Did you know the Sinclairs have a girl around her age?"

"N-No, I didn't. I'm not very familiar with them, Neil." Susan never had much luck getting close to anyone anymore, not in the least because of Neil himself.

"Apparently Maxine is," he declares icily. "A teacher caught her and the Sinclair girl fornicating under the bleachers."

Susan's heart turns to stone and sinks into her stomach.

No.

Please, no.

Neil has very strong opinions about sexuality in general and homosexual conduct in particular, and Susan can practically feel the outrage radiating from him. It crackles in the air like the promise of a lightning storm. Neil's fists are still clenched and his posture goes taut like it always does before he explodes.

"W-Well," Susan begins, swallowing past the lump in her throat.

She hates herself for what she is going to say. She says it anyway.

"Well, you know where she learned that kind of b-behavior from, don't you?"

Because if Neil is going to explode, Susan can't stop him. But she hopes she can at least encourage the worst of it away from Max. She watches Neil's eyes flicker and knows they're both remembering the day they came home early from the short vacation they'd taken for their fifth anniversary, a girl and a boy sneaking out of Billy's bedroom window, neither particularly clothed. She watches the angry bulge of the vein pulsing in his neck and knows they're both thinking of that short young fellow with the skateboard who worked at the used car lot during the day and spent his time with Billy during the night.

"Yes, I know exactly where she learned it from. I'm picking both of

them up and we're all going to have a family discussion."

"I should come with you."

"No." Neil holds up his hand. "Stay here, Susan. We'll be back soon enough."

Neil has gun powder in his gaze and she dares not argue. She lowers her head and steps aside when he walks past to fetch the truck keys from the hook. He stomps down the steps and slams the backdoor shut behind him.

Susan watches through the window as he gets into the truck and pulls out of the driveway, feeling dreadfully ill. She doesn't mean what she'd said, of course. There are a number of behaviors that Max has picked up from Billy, but that isn't one of them. If anyone is to blame, Susan supposes it's herself for passing it along intrinsically.

She has her own secret desires locked away within the chambers of her heart. Desire she dares not confront for her own sanity, for her own safety. She's never acted on her wants, always chose to play private games of hide and seek with them in her head instead, those insidiously innocent wishes of hers. Never spoken aloud let alone pursued those urges that flush hot beneath her skin when she finds her eyes drawn to other women's lips, hips, breasts.

Susan gave it to Max and unlike her, Max is brash and bold and brave. God save her, Max does what she wants to do and doesn't care what other people think. Susan would admire her for it if it didn't scare her to death.

Because Neil does care what other people think. He cares very much. And Susan's seen him annoyed with Max in the past. She's seen him frustrated with Max, displeased, exasperated. But never has she seen the silent stirring of a reign of rage to come where Max is concerned, never has she known that particular look in Neil's eye to be directed Max's way. She can only hope—

Oh, it's such a despicable thing to hope for. Susan has poison in her soul, she swears she must. But Billy isn't remotely hers and Max very much is.

---

Susan doesn't know if it was actually her remark that spurred Neil to turn the blame on Billy or if this was the conclusion he would've come to anyway. Neil often blames Max's mishaps and mischiefs on Billy. Billy being the older sibling meant to lead by example. Billy being the older brother, meant to keep his younger sister out of trouble to begin with.

Her remark or Neil's default thought process, in any case, it's Billy he's glaring at in the living room. Angrily dictates that Billy take off his shirt, belt in hand. Susan grabs a very pale Max's shoulders and begins to usher her down the hall.

"Where are you taking Maxine?"

Susan freezes, mouth going dry.

Neil's looking their way now, brow arched, stern and skeptical.

"I-I—"

"She isn't going to learn if she doesn't watch, Susan," he declares with no room for argument. "Bring her back."

Susan swallows, hands tightening on Max's shoulders. Something dies inside her when she turns her daughter around. She buries it silently as she's buried so many other pieces before and avoids Max's eyes boring into her as she marches her back to the living room. Neil motions for them to sit on the couch, sunlight glinting off the metal buckle. Billy doesn't bother to disguise his disdain, glaring murder, nostrils flaring like an ornery bovine. Susan suspects he'll pay for this too.

"Your behavior today was beyond inappropriate, Maxine," Neil tells her coldly. "Unnatural, disgusting, absolutely unacceptable."

Max squirms next to Susan, hands tucking under her thighs. She is stone faced but this close, Susan can feel her shaking.

"Now, I know it's not all your fault. Big Brother here's taught you—"

"I didn't teach her shit!" Billy cuts him off, sharp and acidic. "I told

her to steer clear from Sinclair, this isn't on me!"

Neil punches his son in the stomach with all the affect of swatting a fly, once, twice. Susan flinches. Billy's gasping, breath knocked out of him. He staggers and Neil viciously shoves him to the floor.

"She saw you with that faggot's tongue down your throat, don't think I don't know! I know you, I know the kind of shit you think you can get away with behind my back!" Neil roars like thunder. "Well, now it's my turn to teach her a thing or two! Pay attention, Maxine!"

Max stiffens beside her. She opens her mouth to protest and Susan grabs her arm, sinking her nails in. Startled, Max's eyes dart to her. Susan gives a tiny shake of the head, urging her not to speak. Max bends her elbow like a chicken wing and jerks her arm out of Susan's grasp. Ire flares in her gaze but she holds her tongue. She does not challenge Neil as he begins beating Billy with the belt.

Susan can't watch. She lowers her eyes to the floor. She can see the movement in the shadows, Neil's rapid whipping of the improvised weapon and Billy's form jolting with the blows. Susan shuts her eyes to the shadows but she can still hear it, thick, hard leather striking bare flesh.

"Don't turn away, Maxine," Neil barks at some point between the sounds of violence.

Billy doesn't cry out. Eventually it's over. Susan raises her head and cannot bear more than a glance at her stepson braced on his hands and knee. The belt now rests at Neil's side and still, her stomach is churning.

"If there is ever a repeat of the conduct you displayed today, there will be consequences. Is that understood, Maxine?"

Max looks to Susan. Her eyes are wavering. Then they glean whatever it is they were searching for from Susan's and harden.

"Yes," she mumbles.

"Yes, what?"

Max clears her throat.

“Yes, sir,” she corrects, louder and clearer.

“Both of you to your rooms,” he commands. “I want both of you to reflect on your actions until it’s time for dinner.”

“Yes, sir,” Billy answers this time, climbing to his feet in the corner of Susan’s eye. She remains on the couch as her daughter rises and plods down the hall, cheeks as red as the cherry atop a sundae. Flushed as red as the welts on Billy’s back that have Susan’s stomach in ropes even though she only spares a brief glance.

Neil sets the belt aside and plops down in his armchair. “Can you get me a beer, Susan?”

She nods and rises, quietly fetching one. Pops the tab and then passes it to him before she excuses herself. In times like this, Susan wants to leave more than anything. She wants to grab Max and take her far, far away. But she can’t imagine they would get anywhere, truly.

Neil controls the finances. Susan makes less money than he does and every cent she does earn inevitably winds up under Neil’s attentive purview. In a distant, ostensible kind of way Susan understands there are shelters for women in her situation. Shelters out there, somewhere...aren’t there? For her situation?

Neil hasn’t actually put his hands on her. Not yet. Not like what he just did to Billy. Hasn’t actually done so to Max, although the threat of that unfolded in the living room in a way that could not be more crystal clear. The threat alone feels like a fist to Susan, invisible fist clenched tight around her insides and squeezing so hard she’s nauseous.

Is the threat enough? Would Susan and Max be accepted on the basis of threats alone?

Provided she could ever find such a place to begin with. Susan doesn’t have the faintest clue of where to look for what feels more like a nebulous fantasy of a sanctuary than a tangible reality. A shimmering oasis in the desert. Even if she were to locate such a

place, what if it were at full capacity?

What if she and Max got turned away?

That would mean choosing between being homeless or going back to Neil. Going back to Neil after a failed escape would certainly mean him making good on all those threats of his, the ones verbal and non. The examples explicit in his words and implicit in his actions. Above all, any failed escape would certainly ensure there would be no second escape.

Susan isn't going anywhere. And neither is Max. The very notion is abstract and distorted, floating just out of reach in a gaussian blur of a wish. Their home isn't a good home. But it is the home they have and so, Susan will simply have to do her best to make sure Max never does anything like this again. That Max never does anything to get Neil's attention like that, nothing to stoke the coals always smoldering in his choleric soul. That as painful as it's sure to be, Max learns to keep certain parts of herself under lock and key.

When dinner is in the oven and Neil is engrossed in his program, Susan slips off to Max's bedroom. She knocks quietly and lets herself in. Her throat knots up at the tear tracks on her daughter's cheeks, far more gutting than the way she bristles as Susan steps closer, the sheer hurt in her eyes.

"What do you want?"

*The same things as you, Susan thinks irresistibly. And I'd go after them too, if I didn't know better.*

"I'm sorry, Max."

Max huffs and turns away. "Whatever."

"I am."

"No you're not. You're just like Neil, you think I'm disgusting," Max spits, hiking her legs up on the bed and hugging her knees to her chest. "You think Billy's disgusting too, you couldn't even look at him."



"No, I don't...oh, Max." Susan swallows and lowers herself to a sit beside her on the bed, gently placing a hand on her knee. She swallows her heartbreak when Max's eyes flash as though the touch scalds her. "Neil and I disagree about many things. This is one of them."

"Then why didn't you say that?" The blaze in Max's eyes dies down, voice softening to cinders. "Why didn't you stop him?"

"Oh, he's so much bigger than me, Max." Susan sags with familiar defeat. "And I— I don't think it's wrong, you and this girl."

"Lucy."

"I'm sure Lucy is lovely," leaves Susan's lips, this fragile whisper she dares not tempt fate to speak above. "I could never think that you're disgusting. But I'm just me, Max, and Neil is bigger, and the world... the world too, is so much bigger than I am. You can't— never, ever in public."

Max's eyes widen. Susan shifts on the bed and moves her hands, finds both of Max's and squeezes tight.

"You cannot be open with feelings like that. You can't take girls to your school dances, you can't kiss them where other people could see."

Max lets out an angry growl even as her eyes well up.

"It's not fair!"

"I know. I'm sorry."

"That's not good enough!"

"I know." She knows, oh, she knows, she's never not choking on it.

Max chews her lip, scarlet and fuming. Susan halfway expects her daughter to headbutt her or holler right in her ear until she deafens. But after a moment it's almost as if Max can decode all the things she cannot say because her hands twist under Susan's and intertwine their fingers.

**Author's Note:**

didn't rly come out like how i expected, but. anyway.